Conditions Facilitating
Participatory-Democratic Organizations*

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This paper examines "alternative institutions" in a variety of institutional domains as participatory-democratic modes of organization. Grounded in comparative data, it posits structural conditions, both internal to an organization and in its environment, which support or undermine the achievement of its collectivist-democratic ideals. While the literature on social movement organizations well demonstrates the fragility of democratic systems and their tendency toward oligarchization, goal displacement, and organizational maintenance, this work suggests, in propositional form, conditions which militate against these all-too-common transformation patterns.

THE PROSPECTS
OF DEMOCRATIC ORGANIZATION
IN BUREAUCRATIC SOCIETY

The viability of participatory-democratic organizations in a rational-bureaucratic society is, to say the least, problematical. Broadly speaking, this work addresses itself to the form and conditions of directly democratic organization in modern society.

The Weberian forecast that every domain of social life would become progressively rationalized as Western society became more modern is, today, non-controversial. It has become a coin of the sociological realm. Ellul (1964) offers a comprehensive depiction of this process of rationalization. For Weber, the inexorable process of rationalization, and its main locus of expression in bureaucracy, is based upon the technical superiority of bureaucracy vis-à-vis all other modes of organization in history (1968: 973-980) and on bureaucracy's indispensability as instrument of power for those who head it. For this reason, bureaucracy, once firmly established, renders revolution (i.e., a fundamental change in the *structure* of authority) impossible and replaces it with mere changes in *who* controls the bureaucratic apparatus (1968: 987-989). The permanence of bureaucracy is not taken by Weber to be an entirely auspicious prospect. Sociologists as diverse as Weber (1968), Ellul (1964), and C. W. Mills (1959) have agreed that as bureaucratization increases, the locus of control over organizations gets more and more removed from the individual, and thereby entails a loss of individual freedom and control.

This emphasis on the inevitability of bureaucratic domination and on its undermining of freedom and democracy has been termed the "metaphysical pathos" in the theory of bureaucracy by Gouldner (1955). He urges sociologists to focus on the possibility of non-oppressive bureaucracy. Studying a gypsum mine, he finds that representative democracy *is* possible within the parameters of bureaucracy (1954). His case is amplified by other optimistic students of organizations who examine the social-historical conditions which encourage democratic processes in the International Typographical Union (Lipset, *et al.*, 1962) as well as in other unions (Edelstein, 1967).

The quest for conditions which would permit democratic organizations to exist stops short here, for most sociologists of organizations found patently non-democratic situations wherever they looked. Firmly rooted in the work of Weber and Michels, the literature on social movement organizations is replete with case studies which indicate the fragility of participatory democratic systems and their tendency to develop oligarchies which displace original goals. Various explanations for such a conservatizing process of goal displacement (and the attendant process of oligarchization) have been adduced: (1) organizational goals may become increasingly accommodated to values in their surrounding community (Selznick, 1949); (2) organizations may practically accomplish their original goals and then shift to more diffuse ones in order to maintain the organization *per se* (Sills, 1957); (3) organizations may find it impossible to realize their original goals and may then develop more diffuse ones (Gusfield, 1955); (4) procedural regulations and rules (organizational means) may become rigidified in their use by members until they are inverted, in effect, into ends-in-themselves (Merton, 1957); and (5) organization maintenance and growth may be trans-

formed into ends-in-themselves because it is in the interest of those at the top of the organization to preserve their positions of power and privilege within it (Michels, 1949). These processes of oligarchization and goal displacement —taken as they are to be near constants—represent no small problem for the social movement organization, for they may destroy the *raison d'être* for which it was created.

For this reason, the theoretical model introduced by Zald and Ash (1966) is a very important and sanguine one, for it views the above transformation processes as conditional. That is, Zald and Ash propose conditions under which alternative transformation processes (which run counter to those predicted by the Weber-Michels model) may occur (e.g., increased rather than decreased radicalism; organizational coalition rather than factionalization).

More recently, the question of whether democracy is possible within bureaucratic organizations has been approached from a different direction (Bennis and Slater, 1968; Toffler, 1970). Bennis argues that democratic organization is *inevitable* if organizations wish to survive in a society experiencing rapid technological change. That is, organizations will have the intellectual resources to adapt to changing and complex technological problems only if they direct the talents of specialists from many disciplines into project groups which are run democratically and dissolved upon completion of the project at hand.

The literature, then, on the prospects of democratic organization has come full circle. It begins with the tradition of Weber and Michels, which stresses that democratic control over bureaucracies is not possible, and ends with the Bennis forecast that democracy is inevitable in the bureaucracy of the future.

This research takes the perspective that democratic modes of organization are neither impossible nor inevitable. They are conditional. Since "alternative institutions" aspire and claim to be directly democratic, they are ideal vehicles in which to investigate the conditions under which democratic aspirations are realized or undermined, as the case may be. This work seeks to identify the structural conditions which allow at least some alternative institutions to maintain directly democratic forms of organization (as opposed to oligarchization), to stick to their original social goals (as opposed to goal displacement), and to sustain non-bureaucratic, collectivist modes of organization.

The Research Sites

In the past five years the U.S. has witnessed an impressive proliferation of what have come to be termed "alternative institutions." Such alternative service organizations are important sociologically insofar as they constitute a radical

departure from established legal-rational modes of organization.[1] Owing their legacy to the anti-authority movements of the 1960's, alternative institutions may be defined by their resolve to build organizations which are parallel to, but outside of, established institutions and which can fulfill social needs (for education, medical aid, etc.) without bureaucratic authority. Such parallel, oppositional organizations have been created in almost every functional domain—e.g., free medical clinics, free schools, legal collectives, alternative media collectives, food cooperatives, research collectives, communes. Some of them are burgeoning at a remarkable rate: For instance, in 1967 there were about 30 free schools in the U.S. By 1973 there were over 800 documented free schools (New Schools Exchange Directory, 1967; 1973); this in spite of declining non-public school enrollments during this period. Unfortunately, little social scientific research has been devoted to this social development. There is some recently published research which describes one or another of these types of institutions (e.g., see the articles in Kanter and Zurcher, 1973), but few which seek to identify the commonalities which link them. Such is the burden of this paper. Unlike most case studies of alternative organizations (Kaye, 1972; Denker and Bhaerman, 1972) which provide a wealth of descriptive detail, often in a "story" form, the aim here is to create a structural framework in which they can be comparatively analyzed as organizations.

This work reports some of the findings from a comparative examination of alternative service organizations in a number of different institutional spheres. It is an attempt to generate theoretical propositions (at the "middle-range") about conditions that facilitate participatory-democratic organizational forms. By grounding such propositions in a comparative study, rather than a single case study, I hope that other researchers will find them to stand the tests of application and verification in other directly democratic organizations they may be examining (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Examples given of each of these propositions are meant to be illustrative, and do not, of course, constitute conclusive evidence.

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[1] The collectivist-democratic form of alternative institutions can be contrasted with bureaucratic organizations along at least 20 dimensions, and a model of organization which embodies their structural characteristics and corresponding ideological system is in the process of being constructed by the author. For our present purposes, it suffices to note that the organizational structures, processes, and ideologies which characterize alternative service organizations bear more similarity to the Chinese model of collectivist organization (Whyte, 1973) than they do to models of rational-bureaucratic organization. Torbert (1975) has analyzed similar organizations as "post-bureaucratic" in their stage of development.

More specifically, the alternative service organizations studied include a free medical clinic, a free high school, an alternative newspaper, and a food cooperative.[2] In selecting alternative service organizations for this study, special efforts were made to choose organizations as variable as possible (some have government funding, some do not; some are relatively large, others small; some employ a somewhat sophisticated technology in the tasks they perform, others' tasks are more simple or undeveloped technologically; etc.). Yet, they are unified by the primacy each gives to operating as a collectivist-democratic alternative to bureaucracy. Further, organizations were not selected for the study unless they were at least two years old.

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[2]All four of the alternative service organizations selected for this study are located in a small metropolitan area of about 150,000 in California.

The free school examined in this comparative study opened for its first full school year in fall, 1970, and this study commenced in March of 1971 and ended in May of 1973. This free school is not an accredited school. It is an outside-the-system, Legal Alternative, day school. It contained from 27 to 41 high school students during the course of this study, 52 % of whom were from upper middle class families and all of whom were white. The school was staffed by a large number of part-time volunteers, recruited mainly from a nearby university, and whose activities were coordinated by a handful of full-time, put poorly paid staff members. This situation permitted an enviable student-teacher ratio of about 3:1, if part-time teachers are weighted .5, and classes ranged in size from individual tutorials to seven. Like many free schools, this one stressed learning outside the schoolhouse through work and participation in the community; affective development and its integration with the cognitive; a critical understanding of the cultural, political, and economic institutions in this society; and a sense of control, or an activist orientation, toward changing society.

The next three alternative institutions were studied during the 1974-1975 academic year. The free medical clinic examined here, was, as the name implies, free to patients. However, faced with economic necessity in its third year of operation, it has recently been transformed into a sliding-scale, fee-for-service agency (though it continues to receive government grants). It is run by a paid staff of six, a Board of Directors, an army of 60-100 volunteers at any given time, who serve as patient advocates, counselors, receptionists, lab technicians, and health education speakers. Until the change to fee-for-service, doctors were largely volunteers; they now have two paid staff doctors. Besides medical services, the clinic has major health education and counseling programs. The central thrust of its philosophy and purpose is summarized in the clinic's mottos: "Health care for the whole person, mind and body" and "Health care for people, not profit." They also have a strong commitment to preventative medicine and to providing health care information that will give individuals more understanding of their own bodies. It has grown from an average clientele of 130 patients per month by the end of its first year of operation to

A number of social science methodologies were used, with data from one serving as a check on the other. First, field observations were conducted in each of the four settings (ranging from six months to two years in duration). This information was amplified by intensive, structured interviews with a number of members from each group. Observational material was further sup-

a mean of 479 patients per month by the close of its third year. Most of the patients (79 %) are between 15 and 30 years of age and are white (86 %). Typically, they come to the clinic for venereal disease testing and treatment (23 %), followed in frequency by treatment for the skin (18 %), and gynecology (16 %). In addition, during the 1974-1975 fiscal year, its counseling program reached an average of 69 people per month, and its speaking health education programs reached an estimated 675 people per month. As free clinics go, this one is very large in the number of patients it sees and comprehensive in the services it provides.

The alternative newspaper under study is just that —an alternate—it is neither "underground" nor "establishment." Conceived in December, 1971 as an agent of social change in a city dominated by one conservative newspaper, its circulation has grown to about 22,000. A full-time staff which ranges in size from 14 to 18 puts out a weekly newspaper of 28-36 pages. In an effort to produce a more progressive social climate in this city, the paper engages in "advocacy journalism" and presents the news from a liberal-to-radical perspective. Liberalizing local political changes have taken place since the creation of this paper, but it is, of course, difficult to tie them directly to the impacts of the paper. Most of the readers of the paper (74 %) are very satisfied with its quality.

The food cooperative examined here began in 1970 as a buying club for about 100 people, operating out of members' living rooms. In January 1974, it developed into a direct charge grocery store (for members only) which charges each member a monthly service charge to cover overhead expenses and sells food at cost, and to which each member donates at least one hour's work per month. In this form the co-op has attracted over 1100 members in one and one-half years of operation. It is located in a young, student-dominated part of town. The amount of food it sells is equally impressive: about $35,000 per month during the school year (this declines substantially during the summer). The membership-at-large decides on major policy changes and elects representatives to a Board of Directors at quarterly meetings. In between, the nine Board members make policy decisions at weekly meetings which are open to the membership, and a paid staff of three to four people runs the store. The ideals of the Co-op are "economy, ecology, and community", and it vigorously supports efforts to create other community owned and controlled economic institutions in the town where it exists.

These four alternative institutions provide very different sorts of services, but they are tied together by the primacy they each give to being run "collectively." All persons and organizations have been given fictitious names in this paper.

plemented by questionnaires returned from the members of each organization under study.

PROPOSITIONS: CONDITIONS FACILITATING PARTICIPATORY-DEMOCRATIC ORGANIZATIONS

The capacity of an alternative institution, or any social movement organization, to be directly democratic is conditional. Below I have proposed a number of conditions which aim to account for the relative ease or difficulty a given alternative institution would experience in moving toward its collectivist ideals. Namely, they would facilitate an organization in achieving a non-authoritarian, collectivist-democratic structure, while not straying from its original purpose. Insofar as these conditions obtain, the absence of any of them should constitute an internal source of tension or contradiction for the collectivist organization. These hypothetical conditions will be posed as antidotes to problems which have been taken to be endemic in organizations: conservatism of organizational purpose (through goal displacement, succession, or accommodation), rigidification of rules and ossification, oligarchization of power, and maintenance of the organization as an end-in-itself.

(1) Transitory orientation

One basic, but usually neglected, condition which may have a profound effect on organizational transformation processes is the expectation of transience which characterizes many alternative institutions. Since most of the literature on organizations, including that on "alternative" ones, assumes that permanence is desirable (Kanter, 1972), only rarely has the transitory-permanence dimension been considered as an independent variable in organizational analysis (Palisi, 1970).

The assumption of transitoriness appears to be part of the taken for granted reality of many counter-cultural people. That is, many seem to expect and desire an accelerated pace of social, psychological, and physical change in their lives, and this feeling seems to generalize to their relationships to organizations—i.e., they expect them to be temporary. The wider emergence of this sort of transitory orientation has been examined by others who have stressed its implications for the individual (Toffler, 1970; Bennis and Slater, 1968).

The point to be stressed here is that this sort of transitory orientation carries with it certain latent consequences for the organization that have not been fully appreciated. What we have found is that *a transitory orientation profoundly militates against organizational maintenance and goal diffusion as particular forms of goal displacement.*

In a transitory organization, member apathy is *not* likely to produce oligarchization and organizational maintenance as an end-in-itself (contra the Weber-Michels model). For, *in the face of membership apathy or inability to move toward its original goals, the intendedly transitory organization tends toward purposeful self-dissolution, rather than organizational maintenance and oligarchization.* In the more unusual case of complete accomplishment of its original goals, the transitory organization would be more likely to admit itself obsolete and dissolved, than to create diffuse new goals.

The expectation that an organization will be transitory and the feeling that it is better for it to dissolve itself than to displace its original goals was well reflected at the Free Clinic I studied. There, when faced with the prospect of having to charge patients nominal fees for services provided (i.e., no longer being able to be completely free) one staff member poignantly said:

"I don't want the [Free Clinic] to go on a heart-lung machine. There's such a thing as letting a good thing die, of dying with dignity. . . . That's what I want for the [Free Clinic]. . . ." (February 18, 1975.)

A comparable preference for self-dissolution over goal displacement was voiced at the Food Co-op. Even in a time of growth and expansion, a staff member and founder of the Co-op urged that the by-laws be amended to include the following:

"If we do not get a quorum for three general membership meetings in a row, then the Board should be required to start procedures for the dissolution of the Co-op. . . . I don't consider this a 'radical' proposal. After all, we started the [Food Co-op] as a community owned and controlled economic institution. If its members don't care enough about it to come to periodic meetings, then control will naturally fall in the hands of a few interested people. If and when that happens, the [Food Co-op] will have become nothing more than a cheap Safeway, and it would be better to close down, than to continue without real member participation. . . ." (April 6, 1975.)

The point here is not that the sort of transitory orientation which prevails in these alternative institutions is, in itself, either good or bad, nor, as others have argued, that it will soon encompass many bureaucratic organizations (Bennis and Slater, 1968); but rather, that it carries with it important consequences for the organization: At just those times that other organizations would displace goals and develop an oligarchy, these organizations may opt for self-dissolution.

This expectation that the organization as a whole unit will be evanescent, holds as well for the programs, personnel, and operations within the organization (cf., Duberman, 1972). That is,

members tend to regard the *modus operandi* of the organization as experimental or tentative, i.e., as contingent on its outcomes. In this sense, procedures and rules may never be considered established and may, therefore, never carry the weight of formalism and precedent. Such an experimental orientation toward all operations may be needed to support the kind of *ad hoc*, individualized decision-making toward which these directly democratic organizations aspire, without recourse to matter-of-fact rules and routines. *The sentiment that all operations and personnel in an organization ought to be tentative seems to have the effect of militating against the usual ritualization of rule use which turns means into ends.*

As an illustration of the transitory expectations concerning personnel, it was noted that *all* of the groups under study thought that a staff person who had been with the group for nine months to a year, had been there "a long time." And, anything over two years, as referred to in the case below, might well be considered "too" long:

"[Sally] probably shouldn't be staying here any longer. Not that she isn't good at what she does, it's just that the [Free Clinic] needs the enthusiasm of new people and fresh ideas. . . ." (June 17, 1975.)

Regarding the tentative *ad hoc* nature of these organizations' rules and procedures, the following quotation is typical:

"Don't worry, if there are major objections to our new ID card system, we'll drop it. *All* of our policies and procedures are experiments, in the sense that if they don't work, we change them— fast." (Emphasis added, Food Co-op, December 12, 1974.)

In contra-distinction to the careerist/permanence orientation which characterizes the bureaucratic model, the assumption that the organization including its personnel and operations, will be transitory seems, logically and empirically, to militate against the oligarchization, rigidification of rule use and goal displacement tendencies described so often in the organization's literature.

(2) *Oppositional services and values*

The kind of collectivist-democratic organization examined in this paper seems empirically to justify its existence as an "alternative institution" by its opposition (whether instrumental or symbolic) to existing institutions and cultural values. Free School members, for instance, often pointed to the negative aspects of public schooling in order to positively define and justify their own existence.

My findings suggest that *it is unlikely that members of a collectivist-democratic organiza-* *tion would be able to maintain their self-conscious resistance to more cost-efficient modes of organization if they were in the business of producing goods or services which were similar to and competing with those produced by bureaucratic organizations.* Non-bureaucratic collectivist organizational forms are perhaps feasible only where the desired outcome of the organization is qualitatively different (in terms of services or goods) than that which is produced by the dominant, target institution.[3]

If my reasoning regarding this condition is correct, then we should expect that *the introduction of reforms in the dominant, target institution along the lines that the alternative, collectivist organization pioneered, would weaken the once-oppositional organization.*

This concurs precisely with our findings. For instance, during the Free School's third year of operation, the liberalization of some of the local public school programs attracted many of the Free School students back to the public system and undercut their justification for having a free school.

The converse of this principle seems to operate as well. The Alternative Paper we studied has enjoyed a more rapid expansion of its circulation than it ever projected at its inception. At least in part, this success is attributable to the right-wing character of the dominant local newspaper, thus giving the Alternative Paper a more oppositional quality than it would have if its competition were more liberal.

(3) *Supportive, professional base*

If the collectivist organization is facilitated, as argued above, by a hostile target institution which it can oppose, it is also, paradoxically, facilitated by having a supportive and liberal professional base in its community. That is, the local environment most favorable to the development of alternative, participatory-democratic organizations would combine the most retrograde target institution possible with a large and supportive professional population.

The latter condition surely pertains in the site of this study. Idyllically located between the mountains and the ocean, the city where this study was conducted attracts much more than its share of social service workers of every profession. It is also a magnet for the young, unemployed or marginally employed doctor, lawyer, psychologist, teacher, etc., i.e., the sort of person

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[3]This condition and the next one, which posit a particular kind of relationship between the alternative institution and its environment, assume that the society in which the alternative exists is predominantly capitalist and bureaucratic. Hence, these two conditions would *not* be expected to hold in a socialist-collectivist society.

who, without career obligations, is free to choose any place on earth in which to "get by."

The existence of a large pool of professionals, though usually taken for granted, appears to be a significant contributing factor in the growth of alternative service organizations in the area. Such professionals contribute to the maintenance of alternatives in a variety of ways.[4]

Sympathetic professors set up a special course as a conduit through which university students could be channelled into community organizations for course credit. It is not an exaggeration to say that without the steady supply from this source of well-educated volunteer teachers, the Free School could not have existed for long. The Free Clinic under study recruited volunteer doctors mainly from the ranks of residency and marginally employed doctors in town. This feat, needless to say, would be much more difficult in a city where doctors are encumbered by a higher per capita ratio. The Alternative Paper enlists the (free) talents of several professors who write regular columns and features for it. The list could go on and could include some of the quasi-legal or illegal ways in which professionals employed in "straight" institutions filter human and financial resources from these institutions to the alternative, participatory-democratic organizations.

In short, sympathetic professionals contribute to the development of alternative service organizations in a myraid of direct and indirect ways. An alternative located in a town without a base of relevant professional support (e.g., a free school in a town without surplus teachers, a medical clinic in a town without many doctors, etc.) may expect to encounter many difficulties on this count.

(4) Social Movement Orientation

The above two conditions refer to the relationship between the alternative organization and its "straight" environment (i.e., dominant institutions and the persons who live and work in them). However, the environment of the collectivist organization may be populated with many other social movement organizations, and its relationship to these is also of issue.

All of the organizations in this study may be classified as social movement organizations. That is, (1) they are oriented to goals of social and/or personal change; and (2) incentives to participate in them are primarily value purposive and only secondarily solidary (i.e., friendship and prestige), with material incentives being of minimal importance (Zald and Ash, 1966: 329).

We would hypothesize that *the more a collectivist organization remains identified with and oriented toward the broader social movement that spawned it, the less likely it is to experience goal displacement, particularly in the form of co-optation of goals.* The reasons for this follow.

There is a tendency, observed by the author at the Free School and reported more widely in the literature (Zald and Ash, 1966) for the founding generation of social movement organization to be quite sensitive to the goals and philosophical ideals of the wider social movement, of which it is but one organizational expression, but for the second generation of members to be much more oriented toward the goals and services of that *particular* organization. I would argue that this sort of organization-boundedness makes the latter group see their own futures as tied to the life and success of the organization, not of the movement, and hence, more likely to pursue organization maintenance as an end-in-itself. Becoming oriented to the organization *per se* seems to lead to a narrowing of one's sights toward providing a good service vis-à-vis other organizations in the same profession, but entails a loss of the larger vision of social-historical change out of which the organization was born.

To emphasize, this conservatism of organizational purpose, while not unusual, is *not* an inevitable process of transformation. Organizations can maintain a movement-orientation into the second generation and beyond. The broader visions of the movement provide an ideological anchor, enabling the organization to resist a co-optation of goals over time. The use of a movement orientation as a bulwark against goal displacement was observed into the second generation of staff members at the Alternative Paper. Of course, it may be somewhat easier for a newspaper to keep up its ties to other "radical" organizations and causes than it would be, for instance, for a medical clinic, because such contacts are maintained in the everyday process of putting out a newspaper.

The alternative organizations in this study all began with the aim of helping to create and to reflect an entire "alternative community." The possibility of building this mutually supportive network of community-controlled service organizations depends, of course, on each group maintaining a movement-orientation over an organization-bound one. Members reflect an identification with "The Movement" not only by providing support services to its people and to new movement organizations, but also by dropping out of alternative organizations that they see as no longer contributing to the broader goals of the Movement and by joining other movement organizations that do. The latter phenomena often appear in case studies as instances of individuals getting "burned out," but a comparative study reveals a

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[4]For illuminating discussions of the structural bases of this sort of intellectual and professional support for social change efforts, see Flacks (1971) and Zald and McCarthy (1975).

quite different picture. For example, many of the founders of the Free School dropped out of it at the end of its second year of operation, convinced, as one of them put it to me, that: "providing a groovy education to upper-middle class kids isn't the most revolutionary activity in the world." Although at the time, the "burned out" interpretation was used to account for this exodus, these same people show up later in my study as committed members of the Alternative Paper, the Free Clinic, and the Legal Collective in town. Their first allegiance was always to the goals of "The Movement," not to any particular organization that currently housed them, and it still is.

To understand this emergent career trajectory from one social movement to another, we must develop a "movement within a movement" perspective. Other sociologists have observed a trend for social movement organizations' personnel to flow back and forth among various movement organizations, government agencies, and professional schools that are devoted to a single set of policy issues (McCarthy and Zald, 1973) and our own data reinforce this observation. (For example, a free school staff member goes on to study "confluent education" in a graduate school of education and shows up later administering a publicly-financed "open classroom" project.) However, our study also witnessed a tendency for staff in one movement organization to later become part of other organizations of seemingly disparate concerns (e.g., switching from a free school to an ecology action organization to a free medical clinic). The latter type of flow of personnel from one movement organization to another can be understood by means of a movement within a movement perspective. That is, at least for some participants, the free school movement, the ecology movement, etc. are all considered subsidiary to "The Movement." For such people, these sub-movements are unified and assume importance only in relation to the broader movement that spawned them. If we employ a "movements within a movement" perspective, then we take seriously the words of some of the participants that they are part of "one struggle with many fronts." When alternative institutions are viewed as entirely unconnected movement organizations, the notoriously rapid ebb and flow of personnel in and out of them is thought to reflect a fickleness of commitment. However, to begin to see them, as many of the participants do, as subsidiary movements within an overarching movement, is to recognize a basic coherence and consistency in the actions of individual participants.

(5) Technology and the diffusion of knowledge

The above three factors refer to the relationship between the collectivist organization and different parts of its environment. However, internal factors also condition the ability of an organization to sustain its participatory-democratic structures.

One such internal condition is technology and the distribution of knowledge in the organization. In fact, my findings support the proposition that *the egalitarian and participatory ideals of the collectivist organization can probably not be realized where great differences exist in members' abilities to perform organizational tasks.* For this reason, some of the alternative service organizations I studied devote a great deal of energy to rotating tasks and to cultivating a *general* knowledge about the work involved in the organization in place of specialized expertise.

Observing the effects of extensive job rotation and diffusion of knowledge led the author to posit that: *as the knowledge relevant to the operations of the organization becomes more diffused throughout the membership, the possibility of the development of indispensable and exclusive knowledge,* along with the usual implications this has for power and oligarchy, declines markedly.

Such diffusion of knowledge is, of course, easier desired than done and it seems to require at least one of the following technological conditions: (1) tasks involved in the administration of the collective organization must be relatively simple to that everyone naturally knows how to do them, or they must involve a relatively undeveloped technology (e.g., at the Free School teaching is considered an "art") in relatively non-routine situations (e.g., every student is supposed to be treated as a unique individual) (Perrow, 1970: 75-85). Or (2) the technology involved may be relatively sophisticated and may be applied in more uniform circumstances, if the members of the collective are of sufficiently homogeneous ability, interest, and experience that they can learn the knowledge involved fairly rapidly.

Toward this end, some of the organizations I observed, such as the Alternative Paper, deliberately sought to "demystify" exclusive or esoteric bodies of knowledge; i.e., to simplify, explicate, and make available to the membership-at-large. This was accomplished primarily through extensive role rotation and task sharing (e.g., nearly all the staff, from editors to advertising people, were expected to help in the production tasks of lay-out, paste-up, etc.). Comprehensive job rotation, a large and sudden change for the Paper to absorb, was justified thusly:

". . . We know that —— won't be as good a writer as —— was, and that —— won't be that good at selling ads at first, . . . But people get tired of what they're doing after a while . . . You can't keep a person on a job as alienating as advertising forever . . . We think that the long-term benefits of everyone understanding all aspects of the paper,

and the kind of equality that comes from that, outweigh the short-run inefficiencies that are involved. . . ." (June 18, 1975.)

It should be noted that the staff at the Alternative Paper freely admit (and this admission *is* born out by their experience) that by collectively reassigning organizational tasks by considerations of who stands to learn the most from a job, who has been at their job "too long," and who most wants to do a job, rather than who is most experienced and/or talented at the job, they *are* sacrificing a certain amount of organizational efficiency and productivity, at least in the short-run. (This flies in the face of the supposition in the Human Relations model that worker satisfaction is directly related to productivity and efficiency.) I also want to underline this process of demystification because it so well distinguishes the ethos of these collectivist organizations from that of bureaucratic organizations. For demystification entails, in its essence, the negation of the process of professionalization which occurs in most service organizations. The central purpose of this demystification process is to breakdown the usual division of labor and pretense of expertise, and to thereby allow all members of the organization to participate more equally in its control.

Since the process of knowledge diffusion or "demystification" was found to be a valid condition which facilitates collectivist-democratic forms of organization, we would expect an important source of tension to develop where this condition does not obtain. This may be because natural disparities exist in the abilities of members to learn organizational tasks (e.g., at an elementary level free school) or because the level of technology employed in the collective requires a lengthy period of training (e.g., at a health clinic) which not all the members have undertaken.

Inequities in the distribution of knowledge proved to be a vital source of tension or contradiction in another collectivist medical clinic observed. Over and again, when the issue of whether the doctors should have a disproportionate amount of control would come up in one form or another, the answer was overwhelmingly "No." Yet, in the words of one member:

"Sure they [the doctors] will let you have a collective, they'll let you talk things out, as long as you end up agreeing with them. But the minute you don't, it doesn't take long before they remind you of who's bringing in the bread around here and who's skills are really needed." (February 18, 1975.)

The doctors at this clinic *did* try to demystify health care information, and other members did learn to do some of the tasks that were formerly reserved for the doctors. But gulfs in medical knowledge persisted, and angry conflicts on this issue continued to exist. I want to stress that such conflicts were not due to the doctors being authoritarian. Like all other members of this clinic, they endorsed non-elitist, egalitarian principles. *Disparity in the knowledge needed to perform an organization's tasks is a structural condition, and one which undercuts the likelihood of developing and maintaining a collectivist-democratic form of organization.*

(6) *Mutual and self-criticism*

Another internal condition which appears to support participatory-democratic forms is the process of mutual and self-criticism which is found in some of these organizations. Many collectives, as diverse as the board at the Food Co-op and Chinese villages (Hinton, 1966), have created settings which encourage constructive criticism of self-action, of others in the collective, and of the community as a whole.

As a regular and sanctioned process, such criticism is an important part of the organization that aspires to being collectively-controlled. *A regular and sanctioned process of mutual and self-criticism in the organization,* I propose, *militates against oligarchization.* That is, by making the leaders or core members publicly subject to members' criticisms, *such forums tend to level the inequalities of influence that develop in even the most participatory of organizations.* Of course, the leveling effect of one criticism session may be quite visible, but short-lived. But, when criticism sessions are institutionalized as a regular and positively reinforced part of the organization, the knowledge that one is subject to group criticism helps to curb the assertion of power in groups holding collectivist ideals.

(7) *Limits to size and alternative growth patterns*

The face-to-face, personal relationships and direct-democratic forms which characterize *the collectivist organization probably cannot be maintained if the organization grows beyond a certain size.* Actually, this is the one condition in this paper which should come as no surprise to the reader, for small size has long been held to be a requirement of directly-democratic organizations (Weber, 1968: 289-290). What I have found is that this matter of size is not as simple or straightforward as it appears.

Exactly, how many members make "too" many? Although this was a comparative study, no cutoff point emerged from the data beyond which, as is commonly thought, collective control yielded to oligarchic control. So we decided to put this question of size to the members themselves, which turned up some very interesting results: Of those who say that there *is* an optimal size for col-

lectives in general, almost all of them locate this size at the number of persons currently in their particular collective, give or take a few. That is, beliefs about an optimal size are quite consistent *within* groups, and quite disparate *between* groups. This suggests that the actual optimum size for each collective may be contingent on a variety of organizational factors such as technology and the diffusion of knowledge (as discussed in number 5 above), and thus may not be too generalizable. Indeed, most of the members themselves (from 55 % at the Food Co-op to 71 % at the Alternative Paper) believe that *no* optimal size can apply to collectivist organizations in general. It may well be wiser to define optimal size for collectivist-democratic organizations in terms of avoiding "redundancy" of personnel (i.e., when available people-power exceeds the number required for the job at hand) than in terms of numbers (Chickering, 1971: 214-227).

Since growth beyond a certain size is believed to undermine the personal and collectivist nature of these organizations, several of the collectives under study planned to inhibit their growth. By self-consciously limiting the usual organizational pattern of growth (i.e., more clients and personnel), they unconsciously develop *alternative growth patterns.* Unable to attract any Chicano students and unable to absorb any more students than it already had, the Free School decided to form a coalition with a Chicano community cultural center. This coalition promised to broaden the School's resource base (library, art room, etc., were now shared and enlarged) and to give its students some measure of contact with the Chicano community. The Free School, then, got some of the benefits of growth without (internal) growth itself. Hence, one alternative pattern of "growth" may be seen in terms of building a wider network of cooperative relationships with other small, collectivist organizations.

Another alternative "growth" pattern, emergent in collectivist organizations which cannot afford to expand, is the spin-off of new, similar but autonomous collectivist organizations. At the Alternative Paper some of the staff envision taking about half the current collective and creating a second collectively-run paper in another city in California when this one is "stable enough." But expansion is never imagined as a larger paper or a larger staff.

The Food Co-op plans to double its current store size of 1400 square feet because:

> "We already have way too many members for the size store we have. . . . This would be a good size for a store—large enough to allow for a good selection of foods and certain economies of scale, but still small enough to be a real community store. . . ." (March 13, 1975.)

But after this initial expansion, they envision no more, preferring instead to ". . . start wholly new and independent co-ops with the additional people who want to be members," or to:

> ". . . build new stores in different locations according to our membership needs. But none of them would exceed 2500-3000 sq. ft. . . . If the store gets to be a big supermarket people would just shop at the Co-op because its cheap and we'd lose our sense of purpose and community."

Rare as it may be, the Alternative Paper and the Food Co-op are not unique in their conception of building new, parallel but autonomous, collectivist organizations as an alternative to internal growth. (E.g., Schumacher, 1973, describes a collectively-owned manufacturing firm in Britain which required this alternative growth pattern of itself when it exceeded 350 in size, and Kanter, 1972: 227-228, describes a similar phenomenon in some of the 19th century communes.)

(8) *Economic marginality*

Ironically, *the participatory-democratic character of an organization may be easier to sustain if the organization is economically marginal, while surplus financial resources may actually undercut its collectivist forms.*

Yet, needless to say, a collective must have the means to pay at least a subsistence level salary to those staff members who are devoted to its purposes and people if it is to be viable even in the short-run. The need to generate funds seems to be an important source of structural tension in the collective because this urges a more efficient, bureaucratic mode of organization which contradicts the kind of collectively-controlled and non-routine organization they desire. On a societal level, some form of a guaranteed annual income would reduce this tension by assuring staff of some financial support and would therefore be expected to provide a major impetus for the proliferation of collectivist organizations.

A defining mark of any social movement organization, collectivist or otherwise, is that work is motivated primarily by a sense of value fulfillment, secondarily by friendship, and only tertiarily by material remuneration (Zald and Ash, 1966). A basic aspect of all of the collectivist organizations here examined is that work is construed as a labor of love, not as a "job" or a "career." The explicit rejection of "careerism" in these alternative service organizations carries with it all that that implies about professional certification, full-timeless, lifetime career paths, differentiation of areas of expertise and salaries by rank, and advancement in a hierarchy of offices. Therefore, it should *not* be economically rational for staff members to seek a career in the collectivist organization. If competitive material incentives are not provided for staff, then their work remains

a labor of love, or it is not entered into at all. *A paucity of financial resources and its concomitant avoidance of careerism*, I would posit, *countervails against oligarchization and organizational maintenance becoming an end-in-itself*, extremely common problems in the transformation of any social movement organization.

But, in trying to avoid the emergence of careerists, with the attendant problem of oligarchization, the collective faces a dilemma. *If its pay scales are "too" high*, it will attract and retain staff who are not fully committed to its purposes; and *staff will develop a self-interest in organizational maintenance as an end-in-itself.*[5] Relatively low pay ensures that staff are devoted to the collective's purposes and people. But, clearly, if the pay is "too" low, staff cannot subsist and they will leave by necessity, in spite of their commitments.

If the collectivist organization wishes to retain a committed staff, how much pay is too much and how much too little? Let me try to define these parameters by looking at my two most extreme cases (in terms of pay). At the Alternative Paper, staff members (who work a 40-60 hour week and whose modal educational level is a BA) earn an average of $150.00 per month. Salaries at the Paper are determined by the collective as a whole and are given out "to each according to his need." Some staff at the Paper (including some of its most crucial people) are paid nothing; the highest pay is $300.00 month to a person with a family. At the Free Clinic, all of the full-time staff (who work 28-35 hours per week on the average and whose modal education is a BA) earn $500.00 per month. Here, all full-time staff members, whether they are a 17 year old secretary or a Ph.D. coordinating the health education program, earn equal pay. In both cases, the salary is amplified by the "fringe benefits" of working in a collectivist mode of organization, i.e., one gets much more autonomy and control over one's labor than could ever be attained in a bureaucratic or even in a professional organization.

The consequences of these two financial situations differ markedly. At the Alternative Paper some of the staff live at a less than adequate standard, some appear to be sick a great deal, and a number of capable and dedicated members have felt compelled to leave in search of greener pastures. Two of them soon found jobs in the field of journalism for over $800 per month.

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[5]See, e.g., Helfgot (1974) for a case study which can be interpreted in this vain. My condition of economic marginality is also supported by the work of Kanter (1972: 78-80) who finds that an austere life style contributed to commitment in 19th century communes, while affluence diminished it. Likewise, Duberman (1972) found economic precariousness to generate commitment and community at Black Mountain, a forerunner of the free school movement.

At the Free Clinic, staff members have come and gone, but for reasons other than financial. When the Clinic faced the possibility of becoming a fee-for-service agency or dissolving itself, one staff member was accused, with some justification, by the others of, ". . . fighting to keep the clinic going just because it represents a comfortable, groovy, and secure job to you—even if it *has* outlived its usefulness."

At the Alternative Paper, staff generally made about 18-25 % of the salary they could have drawn at comparable, but established, journalism jobs. At the Free Clinic, some staff people made about 50 % of what they would have drawn at comparable nursing or counseling jobs for which they were qualified. But the equality principle by which salaries were distributed meant that others made about 83-100 % of what they would be paid in comparable "straight" jobs. It was among the latter people that organizational maintenance began to displace original goals. Thus, as a first approach (and additional comparative studies are needed here) the parameters of "too little" salary might be defined as anything less than 40 % of what would be made doing comparable work in a "straight" enterprise, and "too much" salary as anything over 80 % of that base. Whatever the appropriate numbers, the criterion to remember is that material remuneration should not be so low as to lose committed and capable members, nor so high as to engender careerism, organizational maintenance, and oligarchization.

(9) *Dependence on support base*

Another internal condition which promotes a collectivist-democratic form of organization is direct dependence of the organization on its internal support base (i.e., members and clients). In the alternative service organizations studied here, *those which are more independent of the sentimental and or financial backing of their support base, have a greater tendency to abandon original goals.* More specifically, I found that *when a collectivist organization acquires an independent financial base (e.g., foundation or government grant), its leaders tend to lose interest in the sentiments and goals of its members and clients, and it thereby experiences some measure of goal displacement.* The same effect would hold if the organization has a membership base independent of member sentiment (e.g., as compulsory education laws ensure for the public schools). Conversely, *organizational dependence (economic and sentimental) on its internal support base tends to militate against organizational maintenance displacing original goals and to support participatory ideals.*

This is an important condition to note because many alternative service organizations regard the financial support of foundation or Revenue Shar-

ing grants as quite desirable and do not foresee any problems arising from it. Yet, in the one alternative institution in my study which did manage to get outside grant support (covering 83 % of its budget), paid staff ended up spending a mean of 75 % of their time seeking continued outside revenue. That is, by their own reports, 75 % of their time was spent writing grant proposals and cultivating the sensitivities and goals of those officials who award financial grants, and painfully little time came to be spent attending to the sentiments of the volunteers and clients. In the thick of grantsmanship, some staff coordinators even temporarily suspended their "component's meetings," the only formal arena for decision-making input which the volunteers have.

Dependence on an *external* base for financial support can entail not only a loss in participation levels and in leaders' sensitivity to members' interests, but also more direct forms of goal displacement. As part of the health education program at the Free Clinic, pamphlets aimed at "demystifying" health care (e.g., on drugs, herpes, VD) were produced for public distribution. One day an important county official deemed the "Medi-Cal" pamphlet, a pamphlet which described plainly how to qualify oneself for California's Medi-Cal program, "too political." Within hours the staff removed the pamphlet from the shelves of the Clinic. It was, after all, the season for grant-awards. These sorts of "co-optations" (Selznick, 1949) are difficult to avoid when the organization cannot pay its rent without external help.[6]

The converse of this process seems to hold as well. In alternative service organizations that are completely *dependent* on the goodwill of their members and clients for financial support (e.g., the Free School, the Food Co-op), there remains a very high level of responsiveness on the part of the leaders to the goals and sentiments of the membership. For instance, a survey of the general membership of the Food Co-op indicates that fully 74 % of them consider their elected Board of Directors to be either "very" or "reasonably" responsive to their needs, while only 29 % of the volunteer membership at the Free Clinic believe that their Board is either "very" or "reasonably" responsive.

CONCLUSION

The time has come I believe to go beyond the description-rich, but structure-poor case studies which record the events of alternative service organizations.

I hope that this work provides a useful analytic framework in which such participatory-democratic organizations can be better understood sociologically. Much more research is needed on these burgeoning forms of organization, and the relative merit of the conditions posited herein must, of course, await the results of further study.

It has not been the intention of this article to give the impression that alternative service organizations maintain profoundly democratic forms by simply willing it so. Alternative organizations face problems daily in trying to achieve their participatory ideals (Mansbridge, 1973) and stories abound of alternative institutions which, in the interest of stability and growth, abandon their social-political purposes and develop hierarchal and bureaucratic arrangements (see, e.g., Kopkind, 1974; Giese, 1974; Zwerdling, 1975). Rather, this work has attempted to convey a sense of what alternative institutions are like organizationally and the sorts of organizational conditions that support or undermine their participatory-democratic ideals. This conditional approach has led me to conclude that these sorts of directly-democratic organizations may *not* be as impossible to sustain as Weber and Michels led sociologists to believe, but neither are they a facile goal to achieve. Seen as *facilitating conditions*, they open the door of possibility to successfully resisting the usual transformation patterns described in the organizations' literature: conservatism of organization purpose (through goal displacement, succession, or accommodation), rigidification of rules and procedures, oligarchization of power, and organizational maintenance as an end-in-itself. Viewed as *limiting conditions*, insofar as they do not always exist, their absence may constitute an internal source of tension or dilemma for the would-be collectivist organization.

The suggestion that alternative, collectivist-democratic forms of organization are best, or even appropriate, in all circumstances is probably just as dubious as the claim that rational-bureaucratic forms of organization are best in all circumstances.

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[6]The effect that external financial support has on the development of an organization is an issue of growing concern, since financial resources from foundations, government, and church are increasingly available to social movement organizations, especially if they are ameliorative rather than radical in intent (McCarthy and Zald, 1973).

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